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# THOUGHTS

ON THE

# PERNICIOUS CONSEQUENCES

OF

# WAR.

BY THE CELEBRATED

MONS. VOLTAIRE.

L'Abbé de Voltaire

# THOUGHTS

ON

# WAR.

FAMINE, the plague, and war, are the three moſt famous ingredients in this lower world. Under famine may be claſſed all the noxious foods which want obliges us to have recourſe to; thus ſhortening our life, whilſt we hope to ſupport it.

In the plague are included all contagious diſtempers: and theſe are not few in number. Theſe two gifts we hold from Providence: But war, in which all thoſe gifts are concentrated, we owe to the fancy of three or four hundred perſons ſcattered over the ſurface of this globe, under the name of *princes* and *miniſters*; and on this account it may be that, in ſeveral dedications, they are called *the living images of the Deity*.

The moſt hardened flatterer will allow, that war is ever attended with plague and famine, eſpecially if he has ſeen the military hoſpitals in Germany, or paſſed through ſome villages where ſome notable feat of arms has been performed.

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It is unqueſtionably a very notable art to ravage countries, deſtroy dwellings, and, *communibus annis*, out of a hundred thouſand men to cut off forty thouſand. This invention was originally cultivated by nations aſſembled for their common good; for inſtance, the diet of the Greeks ſent word to the diet of Phrygia and its neighbours, that they were putting to ſea in a thouſand fiſhing-boats, in order to do their beſt to cut them off root and branch.

The Roman people, in a general aſſembly, reſolved, that it was their intereſt to go and fight the Veientes, or the Volſcians, before harveſt; and ſome years after, all the Romans being angry with all the Carthaginians, fought a long time both by ſea and land. It is otherwiſe in our time.

A genealogiſt ſets forth to a prince, that he is deſcended in a direct line from a count, whoſe kindred, three or four hundred years ago, had made a family compact with a houſe, the very memory of which is extinguiſhed. That houſe had ſome diſtant claim to a province, the laſt proprietor of which died of an apoplexy. The prince and his council inſtantly reſolve, that this province belongs to him by divine right. The province, which is ſome hundred leagues from him, proteſts it does not ſo much as know him; that it is not diſpoſed to be governed by him; that before preſcribing laws to them, their conſent, at leaſt, was neceſſary. Theſe allegations do not ſo much as

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reach the prince's ears; it is inſiſted on, that his right is inconteſtable. He inſtantly picks up a multitude of men, who have nothing to do nor nothing to loſe; clothes them with coarſe blue, white, green, or ſcarlet cloth, a few *ſous* to the ell; puts on them hats bound with coarſe white worſted; makes them turn to the right and left; and thus marches away with them to glory.

Other princes, on this armament, take part in it to the beſt of their ability, and ſoon cover a ſmall extent of country with more hireling murderers than Gengis-Kan, Tamerlane, and Bajazet had at their heels.

People, at no ſmall diſtance, on hearing that fighting is going forward, and that if they would make one, there are five or ſix *ſous* a day for them, immediately divide into two bands, like reapers, and go and ſell their ſervices to the firſt bidder.

Theſe multitudes furiouſly butcher one another, not only without having any concern in the quarrel, but without ſo much as knowing what it is about.

Sometimes five or ſix powers are engaged, three againſt three, two againſt four, ſometimes even one againſt five, all equally deteſting one another; and, friends and foes by turns, agreeing only in one thing, to do all the miſchief poſſible.

An odd circumſtance in this infernal enterpriſe is, that every chief of theſe ruffians has his colours

conſecrated,

conſecrated, and ſolemnly prays to God before he goes to deſtroy his neighbour. If the ſlain in a battle do not exceed two or three thouſand, the fortunate commander does not think it worth thanking God for; but if, beſides killing ten or twelve thouſand men, he has been ſo far favoured by Heaven as totally to deſtroy ſome remarkable place, then a verboſe hymn is ſung in four parts, compoſed in a language unknown to all the combatants, and beſides ſtuffed with barbariſms. The ſame ſong does for marriages and births as for maſſacres; which is ſcarce pardonable, eſpecially in a nation of all others the moſt noted for new ſongs.

All countries pay a certain number of orators to celebrate theſe ſanguinary actions: ſome in a long black coat, and over it a ſhort docked cloak; others in a gown, with a kind of ſhirt over it; ſome, again, over their ſhirts have two pieces of motley-coloured ſtuff hanging down. They are all very long winded in their harangues; and to illuſtrate a battle fought in Wetteravia, bring up what paſſed thouſands of years ago in Paleſtine.

At other times, theſe gentry declaim againſt vice; they prove by ſyllogiſms and antitheſes, that ladies, for ſlightly heightening the hue of their cheeks with a little carmine, will aſſuredly be the eternal objects of eternal vengeance; that Polyeuctes and Athalia are the devil's works; that he whoſe

whoſe table on a day of abſtinence is loaded with fiſh to the amount of two hundred crowns, is infalliby ſaved; and that a poor man, for eating two penny-worth of mutton, goes to the devil for ever and ever.

Among five or ſix thouſand ſuch declamations there may be, and that is the moſt, three or four written by a Gaul named *Maſſillon*, which a gentleman may bear to read: but in not one of all theſe diſcourſes has the orator the ſpirit to animadvert on war, that ſcourge and crime which includes all others. Theſe grovelling ſpeakers are continually prating againſt love, mankind's only ſolace, and the only way of repairing it; not a word do they ſay of the deteſtable endeavours of the mighty for its deſtruction.

Bourdaloue! a very bad ſermon haſt thou made againſt impurity; but not one, either bad or good, on thoſe various kinds of murders; on thoſe robberies, on thoſe violences, that univerſal rage by which the world is laid waſte! Put together all the vices of all ages and places, and never will they come up to the miſchiefs and enormities of only one campaign.

Ye bungling ſoul-phyſicians! to bellow for an hour and more againſt a few flea-bites, and not ſay a word about that horrid diſtemper which tears us to pieces.—Burn your books, ye moraliſing philoſophers! Whilſt the humour of a few ſhall make

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it an act of loyalty to butcher thouſands of our fellow-creatures, the part of mankind dedicated to heroiſm will be the moſt execrable and deſtructive monſters in all nature. Of what avail is humanity, benevolence, modeſty, temperance, mildneſs, diſcretion and piety! when half a pound of lead, diſcharged at the diſtance of ſix hundred paces, ſhatters my body? when I expire at the age of twenty under pains unſpeakable, and amidſt thouſands in the ſame miſerable condition? when my eyes, at their laſt opening, ſee my native town all in a blaze; and the laſt ſounds I hear, are the ſhrieks and groans of women and children expiring among the ruins? and all for the pretended right of a man who is a ſtranger to us!

The worſt is, that war appears to be an unavoidable ſcourge: for, if we obſerve it, the god Mars was worſhipped in all nations; and among the Jews, *Sabaoth* ſignifies *the God of armies*: but in Homer, Minerva calls Mars a furious hair-brained infernal deity.

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